



for the greatest good



Malheur National Forest

In Brief—July 2015

Photo courtesy of Ryan Ruselli.

An Information Update of Malheur National Forest Projects

10-Year Stewardship Contract

- The first task order was awarded in September 2013, and the work is on-going.
- The Malheur National Forest awarded the second task order of the 10-year Stewardship Contract in September of 2014, containing approximately 27,000 acres of restoration activities.
- Negotiations between the Forest Service and contractor, Iron Triangle, are soon to commence on a third task order.
- Service type restoration work activities were required as part of the initial advertisement for the project, including aspen thinning/fencing, range improvement work, riparian area improvement through large woody debris input, road decommissioning and maintenance, and fish culvert installation. Service work activities are added to each task order based upon the estimated product value.
- Significant outcomes to date include: 12,000 acres treated using pre-commercial thinning, biomass removal and commercial harvest, restoring the forest to a fire resilient state, and the addition of a second shift of employees by Malheur Lumber Company (a partner of Iron Triangle) (first increase since 1998).
- The Forest has also stepped up hiring, adding to its diverse workforce to facilitate the contract's implementation. A further contribution to this diversity and partnerships is the part time use of Oregon Department of Forestry personnel to advance Accelerated Restoration implementation workloads, in support of the 10-Year Stewardship Contract.
- Most importantly, Oregon State Employment Department reported Grant County experienced an unemployment decline of 3.1 percent between September 2013 and March 2014. This was the sharpest unemployment drop of any county in the state.



For more information, contact Steve Beverlin at 541-575-3073 or sbeverlin@fs.fed.us.

Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision



The Blue Mountains National Forests – which include the **Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests** – are continuing with efforts to update their Forest Plans.

- **The current Forest Plans are from 1990, and the landscape has changed significantly over the past 25 years. It is time for new plans to guide our future land-management decisions.** Forest Plans...

- are required by law (National Forest Management Act of 1976), so each forest must prepare a Forest Plan and revise it every 15 years to address changing needs and conditions,
 - are big-picture strategies that coordinate multiple uses across the forests – such as recreation, wildlife habitat, hunting, grazing, logging, and many others,
 - and help the Forest Service to navigate the long list of laws, policies, and regulations with which the agency must comply.
- **Last summer (2014) we asked the public to comment on our draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) related to the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. We developed a single EIS to inform each of the three Forest Plans.**
- **Based upon the comments received during the 150-day comment period and the feedback heard in public meetings, we identified three topics that deserve more community discussion across the Blue Mountains: (1) access, (2) grazing, and (3) pace & scale of restoration.**
 - We developed a “re-engagement” process with the help of Local, State, Federal and Tribal officials, as well as representatives from industry, conservation groups, and other citizens.
 - During this summer and fall of 2015, some of the workshops or meetings that the Forest Service will co-host or will attend across the Blue Mountains will include the areas of access, grazing, and pace & scale of restoration. Most of the meetings or workshops will be professionally facilitated by Jack Southworth from High Desert Partners.
 - We envision that re-engagement will continue over the next year. The Regional Office supports this important phase in the revision process.
- **Our message to the community: “Since it is your forest (shared with all U.S. citizens), we at the Forest Service need and want your help so we can be better stewards of the land.”**
 - We are asking workshop participants to contribute their knowledge and perspectives, but also to be open to others who may have different knowledge and perspectives.
 - Our goal is to find zones of agreement, new ideas, and creative solutions that will help us improve the draft Forest Plans.
- **We aim to produce a final Forest Plan that more people can support – or at least live with.**
 - The Forest Service will analyze community input from the upcoming workshops, along with over 1,300 comments received in 2014 during the formal public-comment period.
 - We will compare this input with the range of alternatives and past discussions on the topics, looking for new ideas and solutions. The Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team will review those new ideas in more detail ,and they may recommend changes to Forest Plan Components.
 - The Forest Plan Revision Team Leader and the Forest Supervisors will carefully consider all recommendations.
 - The Forest Service may modify existing alternatives or create a new alternative.

For more information, contact Sabrina Stadler, Forest Plan Revision Team Leader at 541-523-1264 or sdstadler@fs.fed.us, Peter Fargo, Public Affairs Officer at 541-523-1231, or visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision>.

Murderer’s Creek Territory/Wild Horse Management Plan

- A Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and TEAMS Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) has been established, Project Initiation Letter (PIL) and revised TEAMS Work Orders have been signed, and a BLM/Forest Service NEPA/Planning MOU has recently been completed and signed.
- TEAMS will provide various specialist and project lead services to the Forest (emphasis on Planning), via Work Orders, in order to advance the WHMP EIS.



- Due to the national significance of the Wild Horse and Burro Program, Regional Office and Washington Office points of contact have been established and have been engaged throughout the process.
- Due to the mixed land administration and ownership in the Murderer's Creek Wild Horse Territory (143,000 total acres), partners include the Malheur National Forest, BLM, Prineville District, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and private land owners. There is potential for high advocate and/or volunteer opportunities and interest.
- A broad and overarching Inter-Agency Agreement and associated Charter between the Forest Service, ODFW, and BLM are currently under review, with a target July 2015 signing.
- Approximately 52% of the mixed land ownership (State, Private, and Public) within the Territory consists of lands administered by the Malheur National Forest. Of the public lands, 68% are FS and 32% are BLM.
- Currently, the ID Team is compiling existing data, advancing Appropriate Management Level (AML) analysis, drafting a Proposed Action, and identifying existing conditions. Public scoping will begin soon after those are completed. Key components are the Gather Plan, AML analysis, identification of population growth suppression options, and managing the wild horses within designated boundaries.
- The current management of the territory is directed by the Murderer's Creek Wild Horse Territory/Herd Management Area Management Plan signed in 2007. That plan directs an AML of 50 to 140 horses.



For more information, contact Gerald Dixon at 541-575-3018 or geraldldixon@fs.fed.us.

Blue Mountain Ranger District - Dave Halemeier, District Ranger

South Fork Fire Reforestation

This project proposes to re-vegetate approximately 1,900 acres of stand replacement patches within the South Fork Complex Fire that burned in 2014 on the Blue Mountain Ranger District.

- Scoping expected July 2015.

For more information, contact Randy Kyes at 541-575-3058 or rkyes@fs.fed.us.

Big Mosquito Project

The Big Mosquito project planning area encompasses approximately 36,000 acres within the Big Creek and Bear Creek- Middle Fork John Day sub-watersheds. The project was developed in cooperation with the Blue Mountain Forest Partners collaborative.

The project includes silviculture and fuels treatments, riparian restoration, range developments, interpretive site development, and associated road activities.

- Scoping completed April 2014.
- 30-day comment period on the Preliminary EA ended September 26, 2014.
- 45-day objection filing period on the final EA and draft Decision Notice ended May 26, 2015.
- Currently in the 45-day objection response period.

For more information, contact Sasha Fertig at 541-575-3061 or sashafertig@fs.fed.us.

Starr Aspen Project

The Starr Aspen project planning area encompasses approximately 17,500 acres in the Starr sub-watershed. The aspen and meadow restoration treatments being proposed under this analysis were originally a component of the Starr Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) Project completed in July 2012.

The project includes felling and girdling conifers that have encroached into aspen stands, fuels treatments, aspen stand fencing, aquatic restoration activities, and fish barrier improvements.

- Scoping completed April 2014.
- Preliminary EA expected to be released for 30-day comment period in July 2015.

For more information, contact Randy Kyes at 541-575-3058 or rkyes@fs.fed.us.

Camp Lick Project

The Camp Lick project planning area encompasses approximately 40,000 acres in the Lick Creek, Lower Camp Creek, and Upper Camp Creek sub-watersheds. The project is being developed in cooperation with the Blue Mountain Forest Partners collaborative.

The project will likely include silviculture and fuels treatments, juniper removal, spring and shrub enhancement for wildlife, riparian restoration, recreation, and associated road activities.

- Scoping expected Summer 2015.
- Comment period expected Winter 2015/Spring 2016.
- Decision expected Spring 2016.

For more information, contact Randy Kyes at 541-575-3058 or rkyes@fs.fed.us.

Magone Project

The Magone project planning area encompasses approximately 27,000 acres in the East Fork Beech Creek and Grub Creek sub-watersheds.

The project is being developed in cooperation with the Blue Mountain Forest Partners collaborative.

The project will likely include silviculture and fuels treatments, juniper removal, riparian restoration, range developments, trail and other recreation improvements, and associated road activities.

- Scoping completed February/March 2015.
- Comment period expected Summer 2015.
- Decision expected Fall 2015

For more information, contact Sasha Fertig at 541-575-3061 or sashafertig@fs.fed.us.

North Finger Allotment Project

The North Finger Complex project area encompasses approximately 17, 800 acres of National Forest System lands within the McHaley, Lower Fox Creek, Upper Fox Creek, Upper Cottonwood, Lower Cottonwood, and Deer Creek sub-watersheds that drain into the North Fork of the John Day River, and the Basin Creek and Upper Long Creek sub-watersheds that drain into the Middle Fork of the John Day River. The project area includes six livestock grazing allotments: Donaldson, Deer Creek, Hamilton, King On/Off, Indian Ridge, and Highway.

The project includes reauthorization of livestock grazing on six allotments within the North Finger Complex using adaptive management strategies designed to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as amended, and improve livestock distribution use levels and riparian habitat conditions within the project area. Project activities also include riparian restoration activities such as bog and spring protections, large woody debris placement within streams, new riparian pastures, instream pond removals, and water development construction to provide water sources outside of riparian areas.



- Scoping completed March 12, 2015.
- 30-day comment period on the Preliminary Environmental Assessment began on June 03 and ended July 02, 2015.
- Final Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice expected to be released for 45-day objection period in August 2015.

For more information, contact Randy Kyes at 541-575-3058 or rkyes@fs.fed.us.

Emigrant Creek Ranger District - Christy Cheyne, District Ranger

Central Malheur Allotment Project

Reauthorization of livestock grazing on the Central Malheur Allotment to ensure the effectiveness in meeting or moving toward desired conditions outlined in the Forest Plan and to be consistent with agency policy, and other applicable laws and regulations.

The Central Malheur project encompasses an area of approximately 11,200 acres in a portion of the Headwaters of the Malheur River watershed.

- Scoping completed February 21, 2014.
- Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) released for 30-day notice and comment period July 16 through August 15, 2014.
- Final EA and Draft Decision Notice released for 45-day objection period October 22, 2014. No objections received.
- Decision signed on May 11, 2015.



For more information, contact Lori Bailey at 541-573-4366 or lab Bailey@fs.fed.us.

Wolf Vegetation Management Project

The Wolf project encompasses an area of approximately 39,465 acres in a portion of the Wolf Creek watershed. The project is being developed in cooperation with the Harney County Restoration Collaborative.

The project includes timber and biomass removal, vegetation treatments, restoration treatments, landscape scale prescribed burning, road management, and wildlife and fish restoration.

- Scoping completed July 25, 2014.
- Preliminary EA released for 30-day notice and comment period February 4, 2015.
- Final EA and Draft Decision Notices released for 45-day objection period on April 15, 2015.
- Six Objections received.
- Region 6 Administrative Review Team currently reviewing the objections.

For more information, contact Lori Bailey at 541-573-4366 or lab Bailey@fs.fed.us.

Dove Vegetation Management Project

The Dove project encompasses an area of approximately 43,892 acres in a portion of the Upper South Fork John Day River watershed. The project is being developed in cooperation with the Harney County Restoration Collaborative.

The project, in the early stages of planning, would include forest products, fuels management, road management, watershed management, vegetation management, and wildlife and fish restoration.

- Scoping expected September 2015.
- 30-Day Legal Notice of Comment on EA is expected to occur in February 2016.
- Final EA and Draft Decision Notice expected to be released for 45-day Objection in April 2016.

For more information, contact Lori Bailey at 541-573-4366 or lbailey@fs.fed.us.

Izee Allotment Project

The Izee Allotment project area encompasses approximately 18,444 acres within the South Fork of the John Day watershed.

The project includes reauthorization of livestock grazing on the Izee allotment to improve riparian areas and move current resource conditions toward desired conditions as outlined in the Forest Plan, as amended. Project activities also include permitted use; adaptive management and pasture rotation strategies; and improvements, structures, and enhancement projects to assist in achieving desired conditions and improving distribution of livestock use levels in the project area.

- Scoping completed August 2014.
- 30-day comment period on the Preliminary Environmental Assessment ended on April 17, 2015.
- Final Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice released for 45-day objection period on June 17, 2015.

For more information, contact Ben Goodin at 541-573-4314 or bgoodin@fs.fed.us.

Prairie City Ranger District – Greg Moon, District Ranger

Elk 16 Landscape Restoration Project

Project objectives include restoration of ecological structure and function of forest ecosystems to improve the forest health and increase resilience to drought, fire, insects, diseases, and other disturbances in Crane Creek and Elk Creek-North Fork Malheur River sub-watersheds; restoration of streams that lack hardwood vegetation and the ability to capture and store sediment; and adjustment of the road system to reduce impacts to specific watershed and riparian areas.

Collaboration with Blue Mountain Forest partners has been completed on the 43,000 acre project area located approximately 15 miles southeast of Prairie City. Several issues were discussed during collaboration:

- Thinning and fuel treatments to reduce the current insect epidemics and landscape fire risk.
- Roadless Area and Potential Wilderness designation.
- Management in the North Fork Malheur Wild and Scenic River, Dugout Research Natural Area, and Inventoried Roadless Area.
- Reducing fuel levels in the project area. Forest Roads 16 and 14 are identified in the Grant County Community Wildfire Protection Plan as safety corridors (evacuation routes).
- The objection period is over. The Forest Service has responded to the objection points.
- Summer 2015: Decision Notice (DN) is expected to be signed.
- Summer/Fall 2015: Project implementation is expected to begin.

For more information, contact Sarah Bush at (541)820-3800 or sbush01@fs.fed.us.



Elk 16 project area, photo courtesy of Sarah Bush.

Summit Landscape Restoration Project

Begin restoring the natural processes that will help maintain healthy, resistant and resilient landscapes, rich in biodiversity, with a greater capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of natural disturbances and large scale threats to sustainability within Summit Creek and Bosonberg Creek – Malheur River sub-watersheds.

- Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action are in the development stage as part of collaboration with Blue Mountain Forest Partners on the 38,005 acre project area located approximately 15 miles southeast of Prairie City.
- The project could include commercial/noncommercial thinning, underburning, road closures for stream channel improvement and wildlife security, aquatic habitat restoration, aspen thinning and protection, meadow restoration, sagebrush restoration, range enhancement, and ecological services that benefit the local community.
- Decision expected: Fall 2016.
- Early public involvement will included collaboration with the Blue Mountain Forest Partners and other interested individuals.

Summit landscape restoration project area, USFS photo.



For more information, contact Alissa Tanner at 541-820- 3800 or altanner@fs.fed.us.

Partnership Coordination

- A new partnership is being formed with Portland Community College to enable a veteran to receive work experience while completing his degree. The student will work part time in recreation while completing his program.
- The Oregon Youth Conservation Crews from the North Fork John Day Watershed Council are busy working on the forest, building fence, clearing trails, and putting in stream improvements. While the partnership with the NFJDWC is not new, the work that the crews are doing this year (fence building, trail maintenance, weed work) will be combined with natural resource activities.
- The Nature Conservancy has partnered with the Malheur and Umatilla National Forests to provide an ecologist position to work with the forests and help with restoration initiatives. The ecologist will begin duties in October.
- A partnership has been brewing with the Forest and the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, Southern Oregon University and the Grant County Historical Museum. This partnership will enable all participants to share information and research, provide technical assistance, and share resources to support research and interpretation of historic Chinese mining and related sites in southern and eastern Oregon.
- AmeriCorps and the Malheur NF partnered this year for the first time which brought a 10-member crew to Emigrant Creek Ranger District for four weeks. The crew, with members from all over the United States, worked on trails, repaired parts of an old cabin at Allison Guard Station, and worked on making campground restrooms ADA compliant.
- Through a master agreement with the Powder River Correctional Facility, the Forest will be able to utilize the work crews on selected projects this summer. The Powder River Correctional Facility, based in Baker City, Oregon, provides low-risk inmates for community service work.



The Powder River Correctional Facility by their recently completed Upper Sagehen riparian exclosure fencing project along Summit Creek.

For more information, contact Susan Garner at 541-575-3039 or scgarner@fs.fed.us.

Malheur National Forest Site-Specific Invasive Plants Treatment

The Malheur National Forest Site-Specific Invasive Plants Treatment Project EIS encompasses treatment of known and newly discovered invasive plants using herbicide, manual, mechanical, biological, and/or cultural treatments. This also includes a non-significant forest plan amendment to allow use of aminopyralid (Milestone TM).

The Malheur National Forest is the last of the three Blue Mountain forests to finalize an Invasive Plant Treatment EIS that will allow us to holistically manage our invasive weeds across the forest with a variety of methods. These efforts are important to protecting forest and agriculture lands, including adjacent private, state, and other federal lands. It will also greatly increase our efficiency to allow invasive plant treatments to occur rapidly.

- Expected to publish the Record of Decision in July after completing ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries in order to provide a broader range of treatment options to reduce invasive plant infestations and prevent future introductions.

For more information, contact Joe Rausch at 541-575-3141 or jhrausch@fs.fed.us.



Dalmatian toadflax (Linaria dalmatica) is widely distributed in the area. Biocontrol agents have been effective at greatly reducing the density of the species, but integrated pest management is still needed to eliminate them.